

Scalene

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Summary: Without the threat of dragon attacks, the Vikings believe they can take back the land they view as theirs. Hiccup, Astrid and Merida are the three unequal sides of a society thrown out of balance. To restore peace they must come to an understanding, but this could prove difficult when peace is on none of their minds. An exploration of the relationships between all three characters.

1. Chapter 1

Hi everyone. This is my first time writing in a long while. A warning: if you're looking for straight Hiccup/Astrid or straight Hiccup/Merida this isn't really the place for it. That said, hope you enjoy!

* * *

><p>For the first time in a long while, Hiccup was nervous.<p>

Berk's young dragon riders stood in a line before the doors of the great hall. Hiccup had casually wandered through these doors hundreds of times, but they had never seemed quite so imposing as they did today.

He felt Astrid's fingers lightly brush his own. After three years, he still couldn't tell if it was deliberate, but it always felt like a sudden dive on Toothless. Glancing to his left he saw her staring determinedly at the doors with a triumphant grin. On his right Snotlout puffed out his chest, hands on hips, glancing around at the villagers that encircled them, mostly the very old or very young.

Hiccup told himself this was all ceremony. The deliberations occurring inside were all for show, merely a Viking tradition. Never

in the seven generations they had lived on Berk had a Viking been turned away.

But he was still nervous.

"Wow, hurry up already" drawled Tuffnut, slouching in boredom at the end of the line.

Just then the large doors were thrown open, and Stoick strode down the stairs, followed by the majority of the village. He came to a halt before the line of teenagers, gazing at each one in turn. Hiccup met his father's eye and received a broad wink, before the chief made his announcement.

"Vikings of Berk! Today, on the first day of spring, we consider those who have come of age in the previous year. We think of their strength." He eyed Snotlout.

"We consider their cunning." He smiled briefly at Astrid.

"We acknowledge their teamwork." He raised an eyebrow at the twins.

"Their learning." He nodded at Fishlegs.

"And we think upon the ways each of them has contributed to life on Berk." He smiled broadly at Hiccup.

"And so we have come to a decision, and that decision is this. Hiccup, Astrid, Ruffnut, Tuffnut, Fishlegs and Snotlout..." He paused for effect, but his father's face told Hiccup there was nothing to worry about.

"We would like to welcome you into the War Council of Berk!"

The rest of the village erupted into cheers, joined by a few roars from the back of the crowd where their dragons watched with interest. Hiccup found himself grinning. He had heard those same words every year for sixteen years; the war council was simply a meeting of all those villagers who would in theory be capable of fighting, but it was one more step towards becoming accepted by the village, one more way to make his father proud.

One by one the young Vikings walked up the stairs, receiving handshakes and pats on the back from the rest of the council. He briefly caught Astrid's eye; she gave him an excited smile before they entered the hall and the doors were shut behind them.

Once inside, the teenagers were ushered to the front of the group closest to the large table where Stoick stood, with Gobber at his side.

"Right!" he bellowed. "Lets get to it then!" He was answered by a loud cheer from the assembled Vikings. Hiccup and his friends joined in wholeheartedly, and he felt the thrill of inclusion run down his spine. This was being a Viking.

As the noise in the hall quietened down, Stoick drew himself up to his full height and looked down at Hiccup and his friends.

"I've been inducting our young people into the war council for many years." he said, looking around the hall at the assembly. "But nothing compares to this day. For not only is my own son now a true Viking, a day I have to admit I thought I might not see..." Hiccup rolled his eyes as the rest of the crowd laughed. "But now the council has something we've never had before." He paused for effect. "Dragon warriors."

Hiccup smiled in surprise at the unfamiliar term. It made sense, once you were inducted into the war council you were by definition a warrior, but it seemed his father had come up with yet another way to help incorporate the dragons into life on Berk.

"You all know the story of the land to the west" began Stoick, and was answered by a few shouts. Hiccup knew the story well, the beautiful and fertile land where the Vikings could live, if it weren't for the savage inhabitants who drove them back every time they attempted to take it.

"Time and again we have tried to settle there, and time and again we have been pushed back. But now something has changed. Now we have a weapon not one of those clansmen is expecting. Now we have _dragons_." The hall was silent now, but Hiccup could feel the excitement of the crowd behind him. He felt a bead of sweat run down his back. The fire was in full blaze despite it being what in Berk classed for warm weather outside.

"And not just dragons, but six fierce young warriors who have proved themselves time and time again in battle with the Outcasts, with rogue dragons, and lest we forget, in the battle with the Green Death. Think what we can do, friends, now these young ones are of age and can go into battle with our blessing. Think what they could achieve, what could be won. Think about the land to the west, and how it could be ours for the taking. Think of expanding the village of Berk into an empire, a new land to raise children in, with warmer weather, easy crops, easy hunting." Stoick paced back and forth in front of the crowd, pounding his fist into his palm for emphasis.

"Berk is beautiful, and it's our home, but a second, more hospitable land could increase our power, increase the number of dragons we can house and train, improve our lives in so many ways. And now, with the coming of age of these six warriors, it can be ours!"

Hiccup winced at the noise that erupted from the crowd behind him. He wasn't surprised at the response, people whose opinions could be easily swayed by Mulch would be totally swept up by his father's enthusiasm and leadership. What surprised him however was the intensity of the shout that erupted from Astrid at his father's words.

"Yes! Drive them out! Take their land!" her voice joined the others but there was a fierceness that went beyond her usual tough demeanour. Hiccup was not used to Astrid falling so easily for his father's rhetoric.

But challenging his father was second nature now, and there was a lot he didn't understand about this plan. So taking a deep breath, he stepped forward, turning to face the assembled council. Stoick looked at him suspiciously, but without surprise.

"Wait, wait, everyone quieten down for a second, okay?" Hiccup called, waving his arms. Behind him he heard his father sigh deeply.

"Didn't we want to take the Westland to escape the dragons? Why do we need to risk their lives now, turning them into weapons, when we no longer need to escape from them?" As the words left his mouth he realised how ineffective they sounded compared to his father. He caught Astrid's eye and she scowled.

"Hiccup" sighed his father. "Now we're not killing each other, they've bred, multiplied, and so have we." There were a few snickers at this, and several new parents blushed. "We're running out of living space for both Viking and Dragon. Don't you see how a new space to live could improve the lives of the dragons, as well as those of your village, your family?"

"Well yeah, if the land was there for the taking." Hiccup replied. "But what about the clansmen? Why do we need to displace other people to help ourselves?" At this his father's face darkened and there were several indignant yells from the crowd.

"Hiccup are you feeling mercy for those devils? Need I remind you how seven generations ago they drove us here to Berk, when it was a rock infested with vicious dragons? That they have killed hundreds of us each time we have tried to return? That we could rarely even try, what with the constant threat of dragon attacks?" He slammed his fist on the table.

"Now we have made peace with the dragons, we can finally avenge ourselves. We can finally avenge our kin." He paused, and looked at his son intensely. "We can finally avenge your mother Hiccup."

The hall erupted into cheers and angry shouts. Hiccup was unable to reply, his father had caught him off guard. He found himself remembering the angry six year old whose mother had never come home from the raid. How he had vowed to become stronger, to slay dragons until he felt he could slay a man, to take revenge on his mother's killers. His desire to prove himself to his father, make it into the war council by killing a dragon by the time he was sixteen had been what had led him to Toothless.

When he was sure of himself, Hiccup was one of the bravest Vikings on Berk. But Hiccup was not sure of himself now, and he found he could not meet his father's gaze. He silently returned to his friends who were looking at him with exasperation. As his father called the room to order and began outlining potential strategies, Hiccup shuffled back into the crowd, made his way to the smaller side doors, and slipped out into the relatively cool air outside.

* * *

><p>What I really need is concrit. This really doesn't read exactly right to me, but I've been over and over it and don't know what else I can change.<p>

Thanks for reading!

2. Chapter 2

Well, it's been a very long time, sorry! Since the new film is out, I guess this is now solidly AU. If anyone's still out there, concrit is appreciated.

* * *

><p>Toothless shot past the dramatic rock formations off the coast of Berk. The scenery was beautiful, but Hiccup wasn't paying attention. His head was full of his father's face and the angry shouts of the war council. He should have known he'd screw this up, that he didn't fit into this village. But then why would he want to be part of a clan that was so easily led, and capable of such cruelty? His mind wandered back to the struggle it had been to get the dragons accepted, how the slightest mistake could drive them into a murderous rage. That was what it meant to be a Viking, and Hiccup wasn't sure he was wired that way.<p>

But then he thought of his mother and understood some of that anger. What he remembered most was warmth, and a safety born from knowledge of her power. She and his father must have made quite a pair. He smiled briefly at the thought. But then she had been taken away and nothing had been the same. His father became distant yet stifling, not letting him explore the forests with the others, not letting him out of the house during dragon attacks. If she'd lived he would have been happier, he was sure of it. But then if she'd lived he'd never have met Toothless... Toothless!

Toothless had lost patience with his rider's inattention and had suddenly dropped into a steep dive. Hiccup tried to bring him out of it, slamming his metal leg back to adjust his tail, and the dragon levelled out just before hitting the ground. He came to a screeching halt on a grass bank and Hiccup was thrown over his friend's head, landing with a thud a few feet away.

"Ow. Toothless why would you..." Hiccup looked up and paused at the look in Toothless' eyes. The dragon regarded him intently, with a look of puzzlement and mild irritation, before snorting and shaking his head.

Hiccup sighed and got to his feet, brushing himself down. Walking stiffly over, wincing from his rough landing, he rubbed his friend's head and leaned into his neck, feeling the warmth from the dark scales.

"I'm sorry boy" he said quietly. "I guess flying wasn't enough to clear my head this time."

"Grrrk" the dragon leaned his head into Hiccup, then shuffled back round to look at him again. Hiccup stumbled at the sudden movement. Toothless stared, then bared his withdrawn teeth in what between them passed as a smile. Hiccup smiled back despite himself.

"Ok, no more flying for today. Want to go down to the cove? We could go fishing?" Toothless snorted again, and continued staring hard at Hiccup.

"Fine, well I'm going to the cove okay boy?" Hiccup found himself wishing, not for the first time, that he could understand Toothless

as well as Toothless seemed to understand him. He started off into the forest, the dragon following beside him, occasionally sniffing something interesting in the undergrowth.

When they arrived at the cove, Toothless suddenly bounded forward ahead of Hiccup, coming to a halt before the Deadly Nadder that stood preening itself next to the lake.

"Stormfly?" said Hiccup in surprise. Then "Oh.. Hi Astrid."

Hiccup went red as he remembered the look on Astrid's face when he'd tried to reason with his father. Her expression was similar now as she regarded him from beside her dragon. He hastily tried to brush the mud off his clothes from where he'd fallen, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"What are you doing here? Did you come looking for me?" she said angrily.

"Uh, no, I just came here to try and clear my head," replied Hiccup. Astrid's expression softened slightly.

"You too huh? I'm guessing for different reasons though. And it looks like you took a detour through a hedge."

"Fell off Toothless. I was distracted, wasn't paying attention."

Astrid's eyes widened and the corner of her mouth twitched slightly into a brief smile.

"I guess even the greatest dragon riders fall off sometimes."

Hiccup laughed awkwardly, then sighed and dropped down opposite her. There was a brief silence, while Hiccup sketched meaningless lines in the sand with his finger. While he still found Astrid terrifyingly beautiful, their friendship meant the feeling no longer intimidated him, and he'd come to accept that while she would occasionally kiss or touch him when the mood took her, she wasn't planning on being his girlfriend any time soon. The uncertainty occasionally bothered him but today he was glad he could rely on her friendship.

"You seemed pretty sure of yourself in the council," he said after a while, not looking up from his drawing.

"You wouldn't understand," retorted Astrid, and Hiccup smiled slightly at the childish tone in her voice.

"Try me," he said, looking up from his drawing. He felt the familiar feeling in his stomach as she met his eye, and didn't look away. "It seems I need convincing that this whole 'attack the clansmen' thing is a good idea. You seem pretty convinced. I don't know what I think, so try me. Explain to me why we should."

Astrid looked hard at him but Hiccup met her gaze. She looked away and slumped onto her back in the sand, staring up at the sky.

"How much do you know about the clansmen?" she asked.

"As much as everyone knows really. They have powerful weapons that we

don't understand. They ride horses, which we've never been able to keep because of the dragons. They dress strangely but speak our language, or something similar. They drove us out seven generations ago, after we came to their land from the far north, but nobody remembers what the far north was like." Hiccup racked his memory for anything else he had heard or read about their enemies.

"They have a lot of rituals and their chiefs live apart from their villages. They defend their land the same as we would. I guess I'm just not Viking enough to see why we have to attack them," he finished bitterly.

Astrid didn't respond at first. What Hiccup could see of her face was set in a frown, but he knew her well enough to recognise thought rather than anger.

"Hiccup, what would you say if your dad decided I couldn't be in the war council?" she asked finally, sitting up.

"Huh? I'd say he's an idiot. You're the best warrior out of all of us," he said with surprise.

"But I'm a girl."

"So? What does that have to do with anything? I mean I guess if you have kids it limits the amount you can fight but at any other time it makes no difference. Most people forget Ruffnut's even a girl. What does that have to do with the clansmen though?"

Astrid got to her feet and went and stood next to Hiccup. He looked up from where he was sitting, squinting as the sun shone behind her, lighting up her blonde hair and shadowing her face.

"In the Westland girls can't be warriors. They have to stay at home, wear stupid clothes that you can't run around in, cook and clean and look pretty. They're there for men to take as prizes and that's it," she said with characteristic bluntness. She crouched down to Hiccup's eye level. "That's why we have to take their land. That's why we have to drive them out. They're cruel and barbaric and unfair."

"I didn't know that," Hiccup said quietly. He was thinking of his mother. Had she known this? Was that why she had gone into battle? Had she been killed defending her right to... be killed?

Astrid sat down beside him, close enough that he could feel her body heat.

"How do you know all this?" he asked her.

She didn't respond at first, but shuffled closer to him until their sides were touching. To Hiccup's surprise he realised he could feel her shaking. He hesitated, unsure whether to put his arm around her. She had been known to react angrily if he crossed her unwritten boundaries and he wasn't sure what they were. He settled for shifting his weight so they were leaning against each other, feeling his heart rate increase.

"I trust you Hiccup," she said quietly, still shaking slightly.

"I... trust you too Astrid," he responded, unsure where this was going.

"What do you know about my father?"

"Your father? Wasn't he killed in a dragon attack?" Hiccup realised as he spoke that he had no idea how Astrid's father had died, so many people on Berk were missing family members from raids or dragon attacks that it was simply accepted as a part of life, and amongst his friends it wasn't spoken about.

"Hiccup my father was a clansman," Astrid said softly and there was a harsh edge to her voice. Hiccup felt his heart beat even harder, but he could tell this was a struggle for her. He was briefly reminded of his first days with Toothless, and forced his voice to sound calm and steady when he replied.

"How?" he said simply.

"My mother was injured in a raid and got lost in a forest. The other warriors were driven off before they could find her. My father found her and nursed her back to health, and they fell in love." The harsh tone in her voice was stronger now, and she almost spat the final word.

"She married him, but it turned out he was as bad as the rest of them. She became his property, he wouldn't let her explore the forest, barely let her leave the house for her own 'protection', and when she got pregnant with me it only got worse." Astrid hunched her shoulders, jabbing a finger harshly into the sand. Hiccup swallowed, her words sounded vaguely familiar.

"Eventually she couldn't bear it any more and she left, stole a boat and sailed back to Berk alone. He probably thinks she died in the attempt, how could a poor simple woman sail a boat by herself." She was snarling now and Hiccup realised she was shaking from anger.

"The village was relieved to see her alive and I was born here on Berk. It's my home and I'm a Viking, and nobody knows otherwise. She's never told anyone about my father but me. And now I've told you." She gripped his wrist and pulled his head round to look at her. Their faces were centimetres apart and Hiccup stopped breathing.

"You will not tell a single person about this Hiccup." There was no hint of a question. Hiccup shook his head as much as her grip on his jaw would allow. He could feel her heart beating. Her brow furrowed, and then she kissed him, hard on the mouth so he fell backwards and for a brief second she was on top of him, pressed against him, pinning his wrists to the ground, her knees digging awkwardly into his leg and her lips against his with a desperate fierceness. There was a warning growl from Toothless and just as quickly she rolled off with a warrior's agility.

Hiccup sat up dazed, and lightly touched his lip where the force of her kiss had bruised it. He looked over to her, but knew better than to speak. He'd received enough punches to know she didn't like to be questioned over things like this. She seemed to be getting ready to go, lifting up her axe from where she'd left it buried in the ground

and strapping it to her back.

She looked back over to him and it was like the last half an hour had never happened. She smiled easily with a raised eyebrow.

"If you still need convincing, there's one more thing," she called, as she swung herself up onto Stormfly.

"The clansmen have stories and legends from before we came to that land. Legends of dragons that stalked the air and killed their animals. Until they drove them out, away from their land, into the great sea. Every last one. There are no dragons there now."

With that, Stormfly took off, her wings blowing dust and sand into Hiccup's eyes. Toothless walked over and nudged him gently. He absentmindedly patted his friend's nose as he watched Astrid fly away, his head spinning.

3. Chapter 3

I can't promise on a regular update schedule for this, it's basically procrastination from my master's dissertation, sorry! Still, concrit still very much appreciated, hopefully I'm not making Astrid too harsh. I plan on some chapters from her point of view later which should explain her reasons a bit.

* * *

><p>"Arg!" Hiccup growled in frustration, screwing up the paper he'd been sketching on and throwing it over his shoulder to join the growing pile in the corner of the room. Toothless regarded him with boredom from his sleeping place, before settling down to a more comfortable position and closing his eyes again.<p>

It had been two months since Hiccup had been persuaded to become the strategist for the Viking raiding parties. His first task had been dissuading his father and the other warriors from charging in with brute force. Instead he had convinced them to send out spies to take in the lie of the land, study the defences of the clansmen's great castles, and to gain an understanding of their weaknesses.

However, subterfuge did not come naturally to Vikings, and the information they'd managed to obtain was vague and generally unhelpful. He looked around at the scattered papers, covered with sketches of castle walls and confusing weapons, but he was missing important measurements and information that would help him come up with a clear plan.

Just then he heard a shout from outside, and heavy wingbeats. Toothless sat up and looked intently out the window, then scrambled out on to the roof for a better look. Hiccup nearly fell over stumbling through his papers to the stairs. He burst out of his house and looked anxiously at the sky as the latest spying party returned. He desperately counted the dragons as they came into land, and felt his breathing hitch as he realised one was missing.

"Hey Hiccup!" shouted Snotlout as he dropped off the dragon he was riding. (It wasn't Hookfang, monstrous nightmares were not exactly subtle.)

"Guess what we've found! Seriously this is the most important information we've discovered so far, maybe now we can actually start fighting for a change."

"Where's Astrid?" Hiccup interrupted him.

"Huh?" Snotlout blinked at Hiccup. "Weren't you listening? The clans are... hey wait!"

Hiccup had spotted Stormfly coming in to land behind the others, and ran towards the colourful dragon. Astrid slipped gracefully off her dragon's back, grinning excitedly.

"So what do you think huh? At first we thought it was because they were on to us, but then I overheard some of the serving women and... what?"

"I'm really glad your safe." The relief was evident in Hiccup's voice. Astrid's face darkened.

"You're not even listening are you. You do this every time. Of course I'm safe, why wouldn't I be? And why aren't you worried about the others? You are so pathetic sometimes!"

Astrid stormed off towards her house. Stormfly paused to eye Hiccup, then followed her partner.

"Smooth," snorted Snotlout. "How is anything supposed to happen to her when all we're doing is skulking around anyway? But wait until you hear this!"

Hiccup turned towards Snotlout, trying to hide his humiliation. "Okay, what did you find?"

"The clans are all gathering at Dunbroch. They're going to take all their best warriors to compete for some kind of prize, and their lands are going to be left practically undefended. This is the perfect chance!"

Hiccup tried to forget Astrid's annoyance as he processed this new information. He smiled at Snotlout.

"That's great, that's really useful, thanks. And I'm glad nobody was hurt."

Snotlout snorted. "As if. They're all so caught up in preparation for the journey that they barely even noticed us. I could have landed Hookfang in the middle of the square and they wouldn't even see him." He rolled his eyes exaggeratedly, but then a thought struck him and he grabbed Hiccup excitedly. "Actually that sounds like an awesome strategy. Can I land Hookfang in the middle of the square outside Dingwall castle?"

"No!" Hiccup shrugged him off and started heading back to his house. "Let me think a bit more, I'll have something figured out by morning."

"You suck! Try not to get too distracted by your stupid non-girlfriend!" Snotlout shouted after him.

Hiccup winced as he entered the house. But he tried to take Snotlout's 'advice' as he sat down at his desk. He grabbed a new sheet of paper and began scribbling, doing his best to clear Astrid from his mind.

* * *

><p>"Hiccup, I'm not sure this will work." Stoick peered at the scribbled runes and arrows his son had placed before him.<p>

Hiccup swallowed. "No Dad, look. The castle will be practically undefended and with the dragons..."

"No no not that bit, it's this part I don't understand." Stoick pointed to the bottom of the page. "If every warrior in the Westland is going to be in one place, how on earth are we going to spy on them? The only way to get to Dunbroch in time is by dragon, far too easy to spot. There's no way we could pull this off."

"Most dragons yes." Hiccup agreed. "But there is one dragon who could do it."

"You don't mean? Hiccup..." Stoick was already shaking his head.

"Yes dad, a Night Fury. Before Toothless no one had ever even seen one, he's perfect for stealth travel. We can't miss this chance to see the clansmen in action, they're going to be competing with every weapon they possess, every skill they know, all laid out right there. We could get to know all their weaknesses, analyse all their techniques, it's perfect. And only me and Toothless could do it. You have to let us try." Hiccup stared up fiercely at his father, although at sixteen the height difference between them was far less than it had been three years ago.

Stoick was inscrutable for a second, then he gently placed a hand on his son's shoulder. "Okay Hiccup. I trust you. We'll put this plan in action. But if you're not going to be there for the main attack, you'd better make sure the warriors know what they're doing down to the smallest detail. We don't have much time either, so go." He gave Hiccup a gentle push towards the door. Hiccup paused, and turned towards his father smiling.

"Thanks Dad. I won't let you down."

He ran out the door to where his friends were waiting anxiously for the chief's verdict.

"He said yes!" he called to the others.

"Awesome!" Snotlout threw his fist in the air.

"We finally get to do some actual Viking stuff!" grinned Tuffnut.

"Thanks a lot for your help this morning Fishlegs" Hiccup smiled at his friend.

"Oh you'd done most of the work, you just had some discrepancies that

needed ironing out..." began Fishlegs but was interrupted by Snotlout again.

"So is it still in? Do I still get to?"

Hiccup sighed and rolled his eyes. "Yes Snotlout, you do actually get to land Hookfang in the middle of Dingwall castle square."

"This is the best day of my LIFE!" crowed the larger boy. "No wait, THAT will be the best day of my life."

"We're gonna show the clansmen who really deserves that land!" grinned Ruffnut.

"Haha, uh yeah we sure are" Hiccup tried to join in with the others. He noticed Astrid, who had been silent so far, watching him suspiciously.

"Okay, gather the other warriors at the dragon academy guys, we need to make sure everyone knows every detail of this plan."

The others ran off, but Astrid stayed.

"And the other part of the plan? Did your father agree to that part too?" she asked him.

"Yeah he did. Looks like me and Toothless will be missing out on all the action," he tried to force a disappointed tone into his voice.

"For something much more dangerous," stated Astrid. Then she smiled.

"I'm glad you decided to be our strategist Hiccup. Without you we'd probably have already failed by now."

She grabbed him in a tight hug, then ran off after the others.

Hiccup watched her go sadly. "Yeah, and you'd all have gotten yourselves killed." he said quietly after her retreating form. Then he turned back towards his house to gather what he'd need to start the training.

End
file.